

EDITORIAL

Public Health League Honored

PROFESSIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE leaders joined hands last month in honoring the joint twenty-fifth anniversaries of a medical-legislative organization and its executive secretary.

The organization is the Public Health League of California; the executive secretary is Ben H. Read, who has served as its administrator, guide and representative since the time of its inception.

Back of this joint celebration lies a lot of California medical legislative history which is well known to the oldtimers but which may represent little more than a sacred cow to many physicians and other professionals who have come to California in more recent years.

Historically, the Public Health League of California came into being in 1932, when a group of physicians in Southern California became alarmed at some of the decisions of the State Legislature. These physicians realized that their right to practice medicine—even the manner in which they practiced it—was subject to the determinations of a two-chambered Legislature of elected representatives in Sacramento. The Legislature was subject to all the blandishments of promoters of all types of legislation, some of them enamored of ideas which did not represent the best in medical practice.

In those depression days, many able but unemployed persons were scratching for a living, and imaginations had ample time in which to create new ideas. Some of these ideas, translated into legislative proposals, could have lowered medical standards either by endorsing practices which were legally frowned upon or by creating new classes of the healing arts without regard to sound training.

While the physicians in Southern California were seeing the wisdom of having legislative representation, a group of their colleagues in the San Francisco area reached the same conclusion.

The combination of these two groups brought the Public Health League of California into being and resulted in the employment of Ben Harrison Read as its first executive secretary. Ben was an Iowa-born farm boy who had secured his education in a small Iowa college and had gone on, through newspaper ranks, to become secretary to the governor of Idaho. His political acumen was honestly acquired and his lessons well remembered.

In the quarter century of its existence, the Public Health League has been the legislative representative of medicine, dentistry, hospitals, dispensing opticians and pharmacists in the Sacramento legislative halls. Its job has been to review all legislation which would affect the practice of medicine or the allied arts and to work for the passage of measures deemed beneficial and for the defeat of those considered detrimental to the public—and to physicians.

While no organization expects to turn in a completely victorious record at all times, the batting average of the League over the years has been extremely high. In the past few sessions, it can safely be said, no deleterious legislation has been adopted and all approved legislation has been passed. Credit for this achievement goes squarely to the League and its able representatives.

An idea of the present magnitude of this work can be gained from the remarks of one legislative leader who sent his tribute to the two dinner meetings which honored the Public Health League and Ben Read last month. This man said: "Ben has to be friendly but firm, resolute but diplomatic, persuasive but not antagonistic. He has to learn to know well 120 politically minded members of the Legislature, *and their wives*. He has to follow 6,000 legislative bills which are flying in all directions at once. He has to greet his constituents with proverbial red-carpet treatment and, above all, he has to get his legislative chores done. Ben commands the

greatest respect from all of us in the Legislature and his record over the years speaks for itself."

Tributes in similar vein poured in last month from Governor Knight, Lieutenant-Governor Powers, the presiding and pro tem officers of both houses of the Legislature, committee chairmen and many individual legislators who have come to know the work of the League and of Ben Read over a long span of time.

Some of the most trying tests of the Public Health League have come in the repeated attempts of governors and others to foist compulsory health insurance programs on the people of California. The going was rough in 1938, again in 1945 and yet again in 1947. Hardly a session of the Legislature passes without some new proposal for a state medical system. The League has carried out its instructions in each of these proposals and has successfully defended physicians against becoming state employees, and the people, numbered cases.

Far from stopping at California state lines, Ben Read and the organizational principles of the League have set a pattern for other states. In the early '40's, Ben spent some time in Washington, and out of his experience there came the United Public Health League, a coalition of western state medical associations, which opened the first "lobbying" office for medicine in the national capital. The A.M.A. Washington office followed.

Physicians who have not lived through some of these experiences may look upon the Public Health League of California as simply an additional item, optional though it may be, on their annual medical society dues statements. Those who have worked with the League know it as the champion of medicine in the halls where regulatory legislation is made. And the wealth of proposed legislative bills affecting medicine in every session proves the wisdom of having a watchdog on hand. It is safe to say that there is no physician in California today who does not owe his present system and freedom of practice to the continuous safeguarding of his rights by the Public Health League.

In this alliance of medicine, dentistry and kindred professions in the voluntary membership framework of the Public Health League of California, the American system of democracy is served. Grass-roots organizations, however modest their beginnings, thus prove themselves able to meet legislative threats and to secure passage of sound legislation. The beneficiaries are the people, and many of the state officials paying tribute to this silver anniversary are the first to recognize that fact.

California today has sound medical standards of very high caliber. As long as the Public Health League remains on the job, those standards will be maintained.

The Legislature Speaks

IN HONOR of the silver anniversary of the Public Health League of California and its executive secretary, Ben H. Read, the Legislature of the State of California has adopted an Assembly Concurrent Resolution which was introduced into the Assembly on January 15, 1957 under the signatures of all 80 members of that body. The resolution follows:

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 40—Relative to honoring the Public Health League of California and Mr. Ben H. Read, executive secretary.

"WHEREAS, A quarter of a century ago an alert group of civic minded physicians of the California Medical Association gathered together to form the Public Health League of California 'organized to protect the public health by the preservation of ethical medical, dentistry and allied health services'; and

"WHEREAS, Shortly after the formation of the league, its membership was enlarged and strengthened by embracing dentistry, pharmacy, hospitals and dispensing opticians; and

"WHEREAS, Interest in legislative matters became an early function of the Public Health League to the end that high standards of medical care for the protection of the public could be presented and supported in the California Legislature; and

"WHEREAS, During these entire 25 years the Public Health League has been represented with the dignity and respect to which these honored professions are entitled by Mr. Ben H. Read, its executive secretary; and

"WHEREAS, Mr. Read is also celebrating 25 years of continuous activity as a legislative observer, during which time his fine dedication to the high principles of the professions he represented has won for him and the Public Health League, the confidence and esteem of the members of the California Legislature; and

"WHEREAS, The Silver Anniversary of the Public Health League of California will be commemorated with proper ceremonies in San Francisco on February 1, 1957, and in Los Angeles on February 6, 1957; now, therefore, be it

"Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Members of the Legislature hereby extend to the Public Health League of California, its officers and its members, and to Mr. Ben H. Read, sincerest congratulations on their combined twenty-fifth anniversaries; and be it further

"Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly be hereby directed to transmit suitably engraved copies of this resolution to the Public Health League and to Mr. Ben H. Read."